

# Isabel Wilkerson Biography

Source: [www.litlovers.com](http://www.litlovers.com)



Isabel Wilkerson is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, and the author of *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*.

Born in Washington D.C., she studied journalism at Howard University, becoming editor-in-chief of the college newspaper *The Hilltop*. During college, Wilkerson interned at many publications, including the *The Los Angeles Times* and *Washington Post*.

In 1994, while Chicago bureau chief of *The New York Times*, she became the first African-American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize in journalism, winning the feature writing award for her coverage of the 1993 midwestern floods and her profile of a 10-year-old boy who was responsible for his four siblings. Several of Wilkerson's articles are included in the book *Pulitzer Prize Feature Stories: America's Best Writing, 1979 - 2003*, edited by David Garlock.

Wilkerson has also won a George S. Polk Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and a Journalist of the Year award from the National Association of Black Journalists.

She has also held the positions of James M. Cox Professor of Journalism at Emory University, Ferris Professor of Journalism at Princeton University and the Kreeger-Wolf endowed lecturer at Northwestern University. She also served as a board member of the National Arts in Journalism Program at Columbia University.

Wilkerson is now a Professor of Journalism and Director of Narrative Nonfiction in the College of Communications at Boston University.

After fourteen years of research, she has just released a book called *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*, which examines the three geographic routes that were commonly used by African Americans

leaving the southern states between 1915 and the 1970s, illustrated through the personal stories of people who took those routes.

During her research for the book, Wilkerson interviewed more than 1,000 people who made the migration from the South to Northern and Western cities. The book almost instantly hit number 11 on the NYT Bestseller list for nonfiction and has since been included in lists of best books of 2010 by many reviewers, including *Salon.com*, *Atlanta Magazine*, *New Yorker*, *Washington Post*, *Economist*, and *The Daily Beast*. (From Wikipedia.)

## Book Summary

Source: [www.urbanbooks.net](http://www.urbanbooks.net)

Winner, 2010 National Book Critics Circle Award

Winner, 2010 Pulitzer Prize

In this epic, beautifully written masterwork, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Isabel Wilkerson chronicles one of the great untold stories of American history: the decades-long migration of black citizens who fled the South for northern and western cities, in search of a better life. From 1915 to 1970, this exodus of almost six million people changed the face of America.

Wilkerson compares this epic migration to the migrations of other peoples in history. She interviewed more than a thousand people, and gained access to new data and official records, to write this definitive and vividly dramatic account of how these American journeys unfolded, altering our cities, our country, and ourselves.

With stunning historical detail, Wilkerson tells this story through the lives of three unique individuals: Ida Mae Gladney, who in 1937 left sharecropping and prejudice in Mississippi for Chicago, where she achieved quiet blue-collar success and, in old age, voted for Barack Obama when he ran for an Illinois Senate seat; sharp and quick-tempered George Starling, who in 1945 fled Florida for Harlem, where he endangered his job fighting for civil rights, saw his family fall, and finally found peace in God; and Robert Foster, who left Louisiana in 1953 to pursue a medical career, the personal physician to Ray Charles as part of a glitteringly successful medical career, which allowed him to purchase a grand home where he often threw exuberant parties.

Wilkerson brilliantly captures their first treacherous and exhausting cross-country trips by car and train and their new lives in colonies that grew into ghettos, as well as how they changed these cities with southern food, faith, and culture and improved them with discipline, drive, and hard work.

Both a riveting microcosm and a major assessment, *The Warmth of Other Suns* is a bold, remarkable, and riveting work, a superb account of an “unrecognized immigration” within our own land. Through the breadth of its narrative, the beauty of the writing, the depth of its research, and the fullness of the people and lives portrayed herein, this book is destined to become a classic. (From the publisher.)

## Discussion Questions

Source: [www.LitLovers.com](http://www.LitLovers.com)

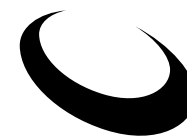
1. *The Warmth of Other Suns* combines a sweeping historical perspective with vivid intimate portraits of three individuals: Ida Mae Gladney, George Swanson Starling, and Robert Pershing Foster. What is the value of this dual focus, of shifting between the panoramic and the close-up? In what ways are Ida Mae Gladney, George Starling, and Robert Foster representative of the millions of other migrants who journeyed from South to North?
2. In many ways *The Warmth of Other Suns* seeks to tell a new story—about the Great Migration of southern blacks to the north—and to set the record straight about the true significance of that migration. What are the most surprising revelations in the book? What misconceptions does Wilkerson dispel?
3. What were the major economic, social, and historical forces that sparked the Great Migration? Why did blacks leave in such great numbers from 1915 to 1970?
4. What were the most horrifying conditions of Jim Crow South? What instances of racial terrorism stand out most strongly in the book? What daily injustices and humiliations did blacks have to face there?
5. In what ways was the Great Migration of southern blacks similar to other historical migrations? In what important ways was it unique?



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## *The Warmth of Other Suns* by Isabel Wilkerson

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